



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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TUNISIAN PLEADS GUILTY IN IMMIGRATION FRAUD SCHEME

South Bay man admits marrying female pro football player to gain legal status

LOS ANGELES – A Tunisian national pleaded guilty in federal court here today to immigration fraud, acknowledging he entered into a sham marriage with a former female professional football player in an effort to legalize his immigration status and remain in the United States.

As part of his plea, Mohammed Hrizi, 38, acknowledged that he agreed to pay his “wife” \$400 on the day of their marriage, along with an additional \$200 a month for the duration of the union. Hrizi and the former defensive linebacker for the Los Angeles Amazons tied the knot in the Silver Bell Wedding Chapel in Las Vegas in November 2002. A photo of the ceremony shows the 6-foot-3-inch bride towering over Hrizi, who stands 5-foot-7.

The criminal charges against Hrizi stem from an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE agents arrested Hrizi December 2, 2004, after executing a search warrant at his Redondo Beach apartment where they seized documents and photos related to the case.

The onetime Tunisian high school science teacher was initially arrested in September 2002 and placed in immigration proceedings for overstaying his visitor visa. Shortly after being released on bond, Hrizi married the woman, who was a customer at the Compton convenience store where he worked. In his plea, Hrizi acknowledges the marriage was fraudulent and that the pair never lived together.

“If you commit marriage fraud and get caught, there is not going to be a honeymoon,” said Loraine Brown, special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Los Angeles. “Sham marriages are one of the ruses people use to exploit our legal immigration system and ICE is working aggressively to combat this type of fraud because of the risks it poses to our national security.”

Hrizi is scheduled to be sentenced June 20 by U.S. District Court Judge Ronald Lew. As part of his plea, Hrizi has agreed to be deported to Tunisia once he completes his sentence.

ICE agents say Hrizi’s U.S. citizen “wife” cooperated with the investigation, but she still faces possible federal charges.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.